Twelfth Night

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Twelfth Night

by justheretoreadhannibalfics

Summary

Jack Crawford is sure he's onto something when he brings Will Graham in for questioning regarding the recent deaths. The victims were all competitors to Doctor Lecter's practice, and no one is closer to the Doctor than Will Graham. Unfortunately, the man isn't giving anything away that easily.

A few years after Tempest, Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter have fallen into a comfortable life with each other.

1

The man was curled in on himself, making him look smaller and more fragile. His eyes were wide, and they stared at the table in front of him, but they were unfocused and clearly he was not seeing the room he was in.

Jack watched through the two way mirror for a few minutes.

He had been doing his research about this man and his powerful companion. He had been trying to find any reason to bring him in for questioning, and he had finally caught a break.

Jack walked in, dropping his file down onto the table and making the man flinch. He blinked, and his eyes cleared and focused on the file as Jack took his seat across from him. The man rocked lightly in his seat, looking for all the world like what his psychiatric evaluation had labeled him as when he had been in college.

Borderline autistic, antisocial tendencies, extremely intelligent.

“Will Graham,” Jack stated, “Popular companion to Doctor Hannibal Lecter. Do you know why you’re here?”

Will glanced up, but his eyes only met Jack’s for a split second. He played with the cuffs of his expensive looking suit and his eyes flitted around like he was a spooked animal.

“Partner, actually,” Will corrected, “Hannibal and I decided we like the term partner better than anything those tacky tabloids have come up with to call me. That’s not what you asked, I know, but I thought it prudent to get that out of the way sooner than later. I assume I’m here because you think I am involved in something of questionable legality. Since you’re FBI, I’m guessing it’s something big too.”

Jack watched the younger man as he fidgeted, but spoke with a tone of perfect confidence and surety. He was terribly odd for someone in his position.

Will Graham had appeared at Lecter’s side a few years before, and had never left. The two were inseparable, and one was rarely seen without the other. In every paper, and every article that spoke about the people or business Lecter dealt with, Will Graham was there too. Any picture of one was bound to have the other, and Jack was starting to think they couldn’t exist in a space where the other wasn’t.

But here was Will Graham. Alone. Apart from Lecter, and open for questioning.

“I would have thought you had already heard of the death of Marius Garcia. He was a prominent figure, and competitor for Lecter’s practice. I hear you follow his career closely, being his partner.”

Will’s lips twitched into an aborted smile at Jack’s use of the proper term. He nodded lightly, his eyes now locked on the file between them on the table.

Jack had been trying to get Will in for questioning, because he was sure the man had something to do with the deaths of several people. They had all been threats to Lecter's business, and that was the only link Jack could find. Jack was sure someone close to Lecter had to be the killer, and no one was closer than Graham. He had to know *something* .

"So, you think I know something about how he died. You think he was taken out in order to keep Hannibal's business afloat, and you think I want that enough to be in on any plan to ensure it. You have probably been waiting for something to point to me, and now you have it. You want to interrogate me, because you think you finally have something."

Jack watched Will fidget, but he wasn't giving any indications of guilt. His mannerisms were not changing from what they had been before Jack had entered and started talking to him.

The man was either telling the truth, or he was ingeniously hiding any tells behind nervous tics.

"I think," Jack offered gently, "that if anyone knew about a plan to do something like this, you would."

Will nodded, wetting his lips in a gesture that would typically show nervousness. On this man, it could have been a well planned action to throw Jack off the scent. Will took a deep breath and closed his eyes, letting the air out through his nose.

"Then, since I didn't know anything about any plan, that shows there wasn't one. You can let me go now."

Jack raised an eyebrow. The man spoke with clear surety, but acted like he was one wrong word away from a panic attack. It was beginning to infuriate Jack. If he became angry, Will would be able to claim it was not justified, and by any account, it wouldn't be. Jack wanted to get a reaction out of the man, but he couldn't risk making him upset.

He had powerful friends, after all.

"Would you be willing to submit to a polygraph? You were the last one reported to be seen with Garcia while he was alive," Jack said, knowing full well that polygraph results wouldn't be admissible in court. He hoped it would give him reason to continue his investigation into the man, at least.

Will glanced up again, his eyes flashing brighter green than they had been before. He didn't make eye contact, but he looked at all the features of Jack's face before looking back down and shrugging.

"I feel like my general anxiety might skew the results a bit, but I'm willing to do whatever it takes to prove I'm telling the truth."

Jack felt his fingers clench tighter into his fists. He couldn't shake the feeling that Graham was covering every single base by choosing his words and actions carefully. By mentioning his anxiety, he was effectively annulling the results of the test before even touching the machine.

“Thank you,” Jack said, knowing he could not justifiably show his anger.

“I assume my client is free to go now?”

Will Graham had an expensive lawyer. Harriet Mendar had come in, and had abrasively stated that Graham would not be answering any more questions without being arrested for a crime. She had seemed to know there was nothing Jack could use to get a warrant, and there was nothing he could do but accept it.

Luckily or not, Will had already agreed to take the polygraph, and he stuck to it. The lawyer had allowed it, but she had kept her unhappy gaze fixed on Jack through all the proceedings.

“Yes. Will Graham is free to go, but I will be in touch with you both. Thank you for your cooperation,” Jack answered curtly, unable to hide his own unhappiness as he once again found himself engaged in a staring contest with Mendar.

Will Graham was still standing with a slouch, curled in on himself and keeping his eyes down away from the people he was with. Jack still had the sneaking suspicion the man was simply the most talented actor he had ever seen, and was capable of fooling anyone he chose to. It was even possible Hannibal Lecter himself was unaware who his partner really was. Jack was sure he was hiding something.

After a moment, Mendar smiled and turned sharply away, walking with clipped steps to the door. Will trailed after her like a lost puppy, his steps light and quiet. Jack watched the dark head of curls disappear through the doors with the sinking feeling that he had just let a killer escape.

Jack sighed and headed back to his office, sure he was missing something. He just had to find it, and then he would be able to catch the killer, whether it was Graham or not. He would go over the results of the polygraph with the technician, but he had little hope they would reveal anything worth his time.

“Good evening, dear,” Hannibal Lecter said, pulling away from his desk and leaning back in his chair, “have you had a very unpleasant day?”

Will sighed, shedding a layer of clothes as he approached Hannibal. He pulled off his tie and tossed it onto the desk with his cufflinks as he slid into the other man’s lap.

“Absolutely dreadful,” he replied, wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s neck and kissing him, “An agent from the FBI questioned me. He is very suspicious, and he was not happy with me at all. I was nearly bored to tears by the time Harriet showed up.”

Hannibal hummed, shifting in his chair to properly wrap his arms around Will’s lithe frame. He ran his hands over Will’s back and sides, nuzzling against his neck as he considered what Will had said.

“Was she acceptable?” He murmured, pressing a kiss to Will’s jaw.

“She was perfect. You have impeccable taste in people, Doctor Lecter. I think the agent was more afraid of her than of me by the time we left.”

Hannibal chuckled softly. The sound rumbled in his chest, and Will could feel it against his own skin. He loved it when he could feel Hannibal’s sounds like this. Almost as if they were his own.

“A clear oversight on his part,” Hannibal noted.

Will hummed, nipping at Hannibal’s ear.

“He’s still suspicious of me,” he warned, “and he says he’ll be in touch. He’s not going to let this go. I’m not sure he was fooled by the show, either. He’d be the first, but sometimes the good agents get gut feelings, and I don’t have a defense against those.”

Hannibal’s hands moved as if he was determined to learn every curve of Will’s body, and he breathed in the man’s scent to add to his memory palace. He would keep every piece of Will in cases and bottles, filling shelves and rooms with nothing but the man. Will had listened as Hannibal described these rooms for hours on end. Every now and then, Hannibal would tell him again, and there was always something new to be told. Will loved it.

“We will deal with him if it comes to that,” Hannibal promised, “unless you wish for us to act now. I wouldn’t want you to be unhappy with me, love.”

Will grinned, biting along Hannibal’s neck softly enough not to leave any marks.

“I think I want to play around with him a bit, darling. As long as that’s alright with you.”

Hannibal began undoing the buttons of Will’s shirt, smiling as Will shifted to straddle his lap and do the same for him.

“I do so enjoy watching you play with people, Mangusteli. The agent can stay as long as he entertains you, then. You must point him out to me when he inevitably shows himself.”

Will kissed Hannibal deeply, tangling his fingers into Hannibal’s hair and humming in satisfaction.

“He will,” Will stated, breaths gasping, “he’s too curious to let this go. No matter what we do.”

Hannibal bit Will’s shoulder gently, licking over the light indentations he left there and smiling.

“A dangerous thing for him to be,” Hannibal noted, “though I share his fault. Did you very much enjoy killing Marius?”

Will laughed softly as Hannibal stood and started leading them both to the bedroom, leaving a trail of clothing items in their wake.

“Nothing in this life became him like the leaving of it,” Will replied.

Hannibal grinned, and it was a predator’s grin.

2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I was wondering if you would show up here,” Madame Komeda said coyly as she slipped through the crowd to speak with Hannibal.

Hannibal gave her his famously charming smile and Will saw her melt at the sight. He gripped Hannibal’s arm just a bit tighter, knowing the man would tease him later for it. He fixed a bright smile to his own face, polite when he needed to be.

“Dear lady, I would not miss the benefit for anything. You know how much I admire and support the endeavor. Not to mention I would have to forfeit the pleasure of your company if I did,” Hannibal replied, his words a flourish and courtesy more than anything. He hadn’t said anything that she had not already known he would.

Madame Komeda laughed lightly, one of the only people comfortable enough around Hannibal to do so.

“Well, I might have to call you reckless, seeing as so many surgeons recently have been dropping like flies. Rumor is it’s a serial killer, resentful of a botched surgery that left them deformed. It’s said they are taking it out on all plastic surgeons now, as retribution. You should be careful,” Madame Komeda said, though people like her never worried. She was fully aware of her precarious position in society, but she didn’t waste her time worrying.

Will hummed smoothly, tilting his head and looking at Hannibal with a reprimanding smile.

“Hannibal isn’t the type to feel threatened by anything,” he tisked, “even when perhaps he should be. I have to do all the worrying for both of us.”

Hannibal smiled softly to Will, and Madame Komeda rolled her eyes. She was used to their particular type of banter, and was perhaps the only person who was not made uncomfortable by it. That was why Will tolerated her being so close to Hannibal.

“I admire watching your mind at work,” Hannibal replied, shifting their positions so his arm pulled around Will’s waist, “Why would I deprive myself of the opportunity by worrying in your place?”

Will’s hand moved up to Hannibal’s shoulder, and he felt much better with the new position. He sighed softly.

“How did you survive before me?” Will asked.

Will knew exactly what Hannibal would say in reply to the question. It was simply the way he was, and only Will knew him well enough to predict him in moments like these. It was also somewhat of a game between them.

“I am not bound to please thee with my answer,” he said casually, “present fears are less than horrible imaginings.”

Madame Komeda laughed lightly, apparently surprised and amused by his smooth words. Will thought she was far too prone to pandering to Hannibal’s pride, and he sometimes resented her for that. Tonight, he was in far too good a mood to be displeased. There was more than one game afoot.

“What on earth are you quoting tonight, Hannibal?” she asked pleasantly, “I can never keep up with you.”

Will rolled his eyes, but smiled fondly. Hannibal would test him to see if he could follow his patterns, and Will would match him move for move through the game. No one who overheard them would be able to follow the meter of conversation as well as they did.

“I don’t blame you,” he told her, “It was The Merchant of Venice, as well as Macbeth, this time. I would hardly expect anyone to follow him to that.”

Madame Komeda hummed lightly.

“Well, regardless, I may or may not be aware of a donation that will only be made if you decide to dance tonight,” she said, batting her eyelashes up at Hannibal.

She tended to do that. She would pay more attention to Hannibal than Will, and consider Will more of an accessory than an individual. Will was glad the majority of the people they ran into shared her habit of that. He was really not one for the spotlight.

That being said, the look Hannibal gave him at her clear request told Will the man intended to make a show of them both.

“I would never refuse to do my part to help,” Hannibal said, his expression a playful question directed at Will.

Will sighed softly. Hannibal loved to dance, and so Will had learned. Will and Hannibal were matched in many ways, including their skill at the sport, but Will did not enjoy it half so much as his partner.

“I’ll follow thee and make a heaven of Hell,” he gave as his answer, “to die upon the hand I love so well.”

Hannibal excused them from Madame Komeda’s company and beamed at Will as they made their way to the dance floor.

“I would not wish any companion in the world but you,” Hannibal replied softly as they joined the throng at the start of the next song.

After the first revolution, Will caught sight of someone familiar in his periphery. He smiled softly and pulled in closer to Hannibal.

“By the pricking of my thumbs,” he said, with a touch of a laugh in his voice.

Hannibal raised his eyebrows and scanned the crowd around them. His eyes lit on the person of interest, and he smiled.

“Agent Crawford seems to have his attention reserved for you tonight, dearest. I rather think we will have to speak with him sooner than later,” he replied.

Will nodded.

“All things be ready if our minds be so,” he answered.

“Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent underneath it,” Hannibal replied, a particular glint in his eye that was always there when they were about to play a uniquely interesting game.

“Rude I am in speech, and little blessed with the soft phrase of peace,” Will warned, knowing Hannibal would understand.

Hannibal hummed softly, spinning Will with a natural grace as the song swelled around them. They knew and anticipated the movements of the other, and they moved with each other as if they were one being.

“Talk sense to a fool, and he calls you foolish,” Hannibal retorted smoothly, “wheighs’t thy words before thou give them breath.”

Will laughed softly. They moved together for a few more moments, hearing the music, but all else being drowned out as they soaked in the presence of the other with them. Even after years, they still marveled at the touch and sight of each other. There was nothing so terribly addicting as finding the one person who perfectly complemented one’s personality and preferences.

“So well thy words become thee as thy wounds,” Will said, smirking up at Hannibal as the song ended, and the dancers all came to a slow stop, “Let’s go have a conversation with a man who would have me behind bars.”

Hannibal kissed Will softly before they made their way back to the crowd. There were several acquaintances that stopped them to compliment them. There were always many who wanted to be seen by Hannibal, and he benevolently gave them each a turn and a polite nod for their trouble.

Will was satisfied with the place he occupied in these gatherings. On Hannibal’s arm, he was seen as the lesser star, and largely ignored. He was not as social and polite as Hannibal, so that pleased him. He was able to see everything Hannibal saw, and study anyone who might become an obstacle for them, without hardly being noticed.

“Excuse me, Mister Lecter,” a voice came, Jack Crawford’s, unmistakably.

Will and Hannibal turned to meet the man with a matching pair of smiles.

“I have been meaning to introduce myself,” Jack continued, “I’m Jack Crawford. I work with the FBI. I don’t suppose Will mentioned me to you.”

Hannibal extended a friendly hand to the man.

“He did, as a matter of fact, though I must correct you on one point, Agent Crawford. I am *Doctor* Lecter. I earned the title, and prefer it, if you don’t mind terribly.”

Jack nodded, still keeping his clearly practiced smile glued to his face.

“I’m sorry about that. I’m afraid I’m not very practiced in social niceties. Side effect of my profession, I guess,” he offered, not phased at all by his own mistake, “but now I am curious about what Will might have said to you about me.”

Jack spared Will a glance, and Will didn’t dignify it with a response. He just looked to Hannibal with his neutrally pleased expression he reserved for times like this.

Hannibal knew when he was the main player on the stage, and he nearly visibly preened at the chance to perform.

“He told me you are singularly clever and determined to solve the murder of one of our recent acquaintances. I admire your moxy, Agent Crawford. Thank you for being thorough with the investigation, even if it did include the interrogation of my partner.”

Jack’s smile faltered a bit, but he was nearly broadcasting his thoughts as his face lit up again. At least from Will’s point of view.

“Well, I can’t say he’s been cleared of all suspicion,” he said, as if it were a joke and not the information his entire theory hung upon, “but I hope that does not offend either of you.”

Will almost snorted, feeling like there should be few things more insulting than being suspected of murder, though he honestly was not perturbed in the least by it.

“There is naught more serviceable to mankind than a prudent distrust,” Hannibal replied, “I find no reason to be upset with your diligence.”

Jack relaxed a bit, clearly feeling he was out of danger from them for the moment.

“You are very well spoken, Doctor,” Jack noted, “and you are both very talented on the floor.”

Jack tipped his head toward the dance floor, and the pair of men smiled more genuinely at the compliment.

“He does it with better grace,” Will piped in, then, “but I do it more natural.”

Hannibal laughed softly, and Jack looked like he had just seen a ghost. He stared at Will as if he had just sprouted antlers. Will amused himself with that imagery.

“I think you will find Will to be my match in every way,” Hannibal told Jack, “dancing is only one respect in which we work well together. He is, perhaps, more concise than myself, but men of few words or the best of men.”

Will smiled, looking to all the world like nothing more than someone pleased to be where he was.

Jack nodded slowly, still seeming to be processing the information he was being given.

“I’m afraid I’m not as well read as either of you,” he admitted, “and my time is filled with searching for killers. I would like to have the work go more quickly.”

Hannibal nodded in understanding.

“There’s no art to find the mind’s construction in the face,” he said seriously, “but, with any luck, murder, though it have no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ.”

Will smiled and nodded in agreement. He had always found particular entertainment when Hannibal used the first quote, as they both knew Will was the embodiment of the art that found the mind’s construction. Hannibal enjoyed using it, if only to amuse Will.

Jack was clearly aware he was out of his depth, but he persisted stubbornly. Will knew he was hoping to find something incriminating in their conversation. He turned to Will, shaking his head in bewilderment.

“You call me clever, but you both leave me behind in your discussions. I have no idea where you are both drawing your words from,” he said.

Will gave him a sympathetic smile.

“Cleverness is not wisdom,” he replied, “but don’t worry too much. Hannibal and I have learned each other over time, and could say nothing and know what the other means. You are the same way with your wife, are you not?”

Jack blinked in surprise and turned his ring around on his finger subconsciously.

“Sometimes we are,” he mumbled, “I’m afraid I have been spending a lot of time away from home recently.”

Hannibal hummed pleasantly.

“Next time you attend an event such as this, you must bring her. I would love to meet her, and I’m sure it would be pleasant for us to have you both for dinner,” he said, then looked to Will, “Of course, if you would be amenable.”

Will nodded graciously.

“Of course. What’s past is prologue, and I hold no grudges against Agent Crawford. If you would join us, I would be happy to have you,” Will agreed.

Jack was clearly hesitant. Will knew it was because he was still the man’s main suspect in at least one murder. There were good reasons for him to either accept or decline the offer, but Will was patient in his pursuit, and would make the best of whichever the man chose. He laid

intricate traps with his words that were as difficult to navigate as a minefield. Hannibal was the only one to have survived the endeavor to that point.

“Well, if Bella agrees, then I’ll see what happens after that. I have to be on my way, but it was a pleasure to finally meet you, Doctor. Mister Graham.”

Jack made his way through the crowd and to the exit. Will had expected as much. He had only been there to watch for him, and observe his behavior. Will watched as Jack turned back to look at him one more time, and he gave the agent a wink before turning back to Hannibal.

Agent Crawford would spend hours awake in bed, trying to figure out what everything meant. Why had Will seemed so confident and cool? Why had he spoken in seeming riddles? Why had he winked?

Will was entirely satisfied with how the night had gone thus far, but his mood was immediately dampened by the approach of another familiar face.

“Why, Doctor Lecter,” Frederick Chilton drawled as he walked up, “I’m glad there was another brave enough to show himself in the midst of the recent tragedies. You would not believe how many people have expressed their concern for my safety just tonight.”

Hannibal fixed his fake smile to his face and nodded at the man.

“When our actions do not, our fears do make us traitors,” Hannibal replied, “and I do not intend to be a traitor unto myself.”

Chilton’s eyes gained the glazed look that often accompanied moments when he was in over his head, but ignorant of the fact and determined to belong.

“Yes, well,” he said, then turned to Will, who only managed a slight smile out of courtesy, “How are you doing tonight, Will? I would have thought you would be too afraid to be seen, having your association with the craft as you do.”

Will ran his tongue over his teeth, as if testing their sharpness.

“Conscience doth make cowards of us all, Doctor. Perhaps those who fear being seen are those who know they have a sin on their head,” he replied coolly.

Will was able to fake his social persona for the most part, but there were a few people who stripped him of restraint. Chilton was the chief among them, being the most loathsome creature Will had ever had the displeasure of being introduced to. The man was slimy in the metaphorical sense, but Will imagined it as a physical quality of his skin as well. A small amusement he could gain from thoughts of him.

Chilton nodded, as if he understood what Will had just said.

“I agree entirely, though mistakes in our field of work are mainly the fault of the patient,” he stated haughtily, “I find people are prone to lying about their medical history, and it causes complications in the operation. Their resulting deformity is not to be blamed on the surgeon in most cases.”

Hannibal hummed, though it was not in agreement. Will knew they were thinking the same thing.

Chilton had botched several surgeries, and had been taken to court over them repeatedly. He slipped vague terms into the agreements his patients would sign, giving him the upper hand when his overpaid lawyer defended him. Only a doctor who made frequent and egregious mistakes would argue he was not at fault before being accused, the way Chilton just had.

If Will had not already had such a pleasant night, he might have said as much to the man, despite how rude it would appear, and regardless of consequence.

As it was, he just smiled politely, and offered nothing in reply.

“I was just approached by an agent of the FBI,” Hannibal revealed, as if sharing in some secret, “it appears the deaths of our associates has reached the Bureau. Have you been questioned yet?”

Chilton’s eyes grew wide and they darted around the room, as if he would be able to identify an agent just by sight. Hannibal had not revealed that Jack had already left the event, leaving the man to stew in worry.

“Really?” Chilton asked, “I hadn’t heard that. Do you think he will be coming around to us others?”

Hannibal nodded.

“I am under the impression he intends to interrogate anyone who has connections to our field of work, and he *even* seemed suspicious of Will.”

Will shrank into himself a bit, looking embarrassed and shy. Chilton was especially susceptible to his acting, and Will knew what Hannibal intended to achieve with this conversation.

Chilton turned to Will with pity and concern in his eyes.

“My god, really? I hope he was not too abrasive with you, mister Graham. I understand you have a delicate disposition. I was a psychologist in another life.”

Will wanted to laugh at him for that, but he kept his composure and just shook his head softly. Chilton had been as much of a psychologist as he was now a chef. He had tried his hand at a few things, but the only market that served him in his narcissism and tendency to take advantage of others was in plastic surgery. It was unfortunate that it put him in the line of interacting with Hannibal.

“I was startled by it more than anything,” Will said, “but he was not terribly unkind.”

Hannibal pulled Will closer, as if to comfort him, pressing a kiss into Will’s hair. Will knew he was also hiding his smile, as he always smiled when he was witness to Will’s acting.

Chilton sighed, as if it were truly a crime that Will had even been considered a suspect. He was incredibly easy to manipulate, and potentially easy to frame, which was why he still survived. Not to mention, he had a reputation as a surgeon who frequently botched procedures, so he was no real threat to Hannibal's business.

"Well, I certainly thank you for the warning ahead of time. I don't wish any of my acquaintances to be startled by any questioning the FBI might find necessary," Chilton said.

Hannibal nodded.

"I wouldn't wish that on anyone," he replied benevolently, "but I must inform you the agent we spoke to was intent on keeping the investigation under wraps. I would consider it a personal favor if you could not speak of it for the time being."

Chilton nodded, clasping his hands together.

"Of course, Doctor Lecter. My lips are sealed. Well, I really must be on my way. I hope to see you again soon. Both of you."

Hannibal and Will bid him a good night, and made their own way out to the Bentley, and then home.

Chapter End Notes

The quote from chapter one was from Macbeth. "nothing in this life became him like the leaving of it."
The quotes from this chapter:
"I'll follow thee and make a heaven of hell, to die upon the hand I love so well" -Midsummer Night's Dream
"I would not wish any companion in the world but you" -The Tempest
"By the pricking of my thumbs (something wicked this way comes)" -Macbeth
"All things be ready if our minds be so" -Henry V
"Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent underneath it" -Macbeth
"Rude I am in speech, and little blessed with the soft phrase of peace" -Othello
"Weighs't thy words before thou gives them breath" -Othello
"So well thy words become thee as thy wounds" -Macbeth
"There is naught more serviceable to mankind than a prudent distrust" -Euripides
"He does it with better grace, but I do it more natural" -Hamlet
"Men of few words are the best of men" -Henry V
"There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face" -Hamlet
"Murder, though it have no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ" -Hamlet
"Cleverness is not wisdom" -Euripides
"What's past is prologue" -The Tempest
"When our actions do not, our fears do make us traitors" -Macbeth
"Conscience doth make cowards of us all" -Hamlet

3

Jack lay in bed, listening to his wife's breathing, with his mind racing.

Everything Graham had said seemed to have multiple meanings, but they were so convoluted that he could not be sure *what* the meanings were. The way he had moved, and stood, and spoken, were all so *different* from when he had been in the interrogation. It was as if he had become a new person, fitting his personality to the atmosphere of wherever he was. He changed in order to best serve his needs.

But did Hannibal Lecter really not know of how his partner changed?

Jack found it hard to believe, after seeing how they understood each other so perfectly regardless of what they said. The way they had moved in perfect unison as they danced, as if they were born to do it.

But was that just another part of Will's chameleon nature? Did he just manage to become what Hannibal thought he was, and fool even the man who *he* claimed knew him better than anyone?

Will hadn't given Jack any reason to suspect him, really. He hadn't done anything wrong that Jack could find, other than being seen with a man who turned up dead later. That was hardly a crime.

Jack had been looking into Will more after the interrogation, and what he had found only muddied the waters more.

Will had grown up in Louisiana, traveling with his father and fixing boat motors. He had done well in school, when he attended. When he had gotten to college, he had stunned his professors with his intelligence. Some even claimed he must have been cheating in some way, but they could never find anything to incriminate him. He had studied psychology and forensics, and had been labelled genius by many professors.

He had never been in any altercations, or even disagreements, as far as Jack could find. One of his thesis papers had resulted in the closing of three cold cases, which had turned out to be connected to each other. He was the *only* one who had seen it.

After college, Will Graham had disappeared. He had fallen off the face of the earth, leaving no traces of his comings and goings for five years. The next appearance he made was when he had debuted as Hannibal Lecter's plus one to an opera.

The papers and gossip columns had been *full* of pictures of him for weeks. No one knew who he was, or where he had come from. He had been smiling shyly and clinging to Hannibal's arm in all the pictures from that night, dressed to the nines in clothes only people like Lecter could afford. There had been theories and conspiracies rushing from every mouth in Baltimore, and it seemed like no one could find anything out about him.

After about a month, the novelty of the man had worn off, and society had gradually come to accept him. His presence was now just another aspect of life. Where Hannibal went, Will was expected to be also.

But then the murders had started, and Jack had taken notice.

Of course, not only people in the plastic surgery business were dying, or being killed, but there was a pattern emerging that they were becoming more popular as targets. The MO matched for each of their deaths, and Jack was certain it was the work of a serial killer. He was also sure Will Graham had something to do with it.

He just needed to find something to support the theory. He needed time to work on the case, and agents who could think like him. He needed help finding the evidence to show there was a connection. He had gotten lucky with Will being the last seen with Marius, but he couldn't count on something like that happening again. Especially if Will *was* the killer. He was too smart to make that mistake again.

Jack turned over and looked at his wife, watching the slow and steady rise and fall of her chest.

Life was short, and Jack wanted *his* to have meaning. He had felt his wife start growing distant, and he didn't know why. She deserved to have her own secrets, and she would talk when she was ready. Jack wanted to solve this case, and then take a vacation. He wanted to take her back to Italy, and remind both of them how much they loved each other. He wanted to see her smile like she once had, and know she was his.

But there were killers out there, and Jack had the obligation to rid the world of them if he could.

He wanted his Bella to be proud of the man she chose to marry.

"I was thinking we might consider having a conversation with Miss Lounds," Hannibal said, sitting at his harpsichord.

Will looked up from his book and raised an eyebrow.

"And compromise the trust Jack Crawford had given us by speaking to us in an unofficial setting?" he asked, "I'm intrigued. Please, Doctor, *proceed*."

Hannibal smiled softly as he played out a few lines of a song. He enjoyed playing as he spoke, and Will had gotten used to it quickly after meeting the man.

"I believe it would be beneficial to your *game* at least, dearest. He does not think we are the type to speak with reporters, and would not expect it from us. It would also gain public attention, forcing him to tread more carefully as he investigates."

Will hummed in thought, listening to the notes of whatever song Hannibal had chosen for that day. Will was horrible at learning the titles for songs, and Hannibal had learned to forgive it

in him. They could not be exactly the same in *every* way, after all. That would be boring.

“It may also hurt your practice,” Will noted, “which I am generally against. There is, in reality, a *bad* type of publicity.”

Hannibal was silent for a moment as his fingers continued to dance over the keys of his instrument.

“I would think the results would be worth the sacrifice,” he said, “and I am perfectly capable of withstanding a small amount of damage to my income. I do not rely on it for my lifestyle, as you know.”

Will shrugged.

“I know. I just think we should wait and see how much damage Chilton has managed to do. It’s only a matter of time. He might do all the work for us, and manage to leave your business out of it. We could avoid the unpleasantness, and reap the rewards.”

Hannibal smiled warmly and nodded. He played the rest of the piece without conversation, and Will laid his head back on the couch as he listened. He loved listening to Hannibal play his instruments. He had never been a big fan of classical music before meeting Hannibal, but he had learned to enjoy it nearly as much as the man himself.

When the song was finished, Hannibal stopped playing and Will kept his eyes closed. There was not another sound, but Will was used to Hannibal moving silently. He knew where Hannibal was, and what he was doing, even though he had no proof.

Hannibal slipped onto the couch, pulling Will against his chest and threading his fingers through Will’s hair.

“You want Jack to accept the dinner invitation, when we extend it,” Hannibal said softly.

Will hummed.

“I think it would be *fun* to stay in his good graces, while Chilton takes the brunt of the fall,” he agreed, his own voice soft and sleepy in his contentment.

“If others had not been foolish, we would be so,” Hannibal mused, nuzzling through Will’s curls along with his hand.

Will hummed in agreement.

“Lucky for us, there is no shortage of foolishness in the world where we reside. The play is the thing, and our prey is veritably a king.”

“Danger gleams like sunshine to a brave man’s eyes,” Hannibal warned, though he did not sound concerned in the least, “There’s daggers in men’s smiles.”

Will huffed a soft laugh.

“Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures,” Will replied, amused by Hannibal’s insistence to continue with the poetic banter, “The expedition of my violent love outrun the pauser, reason.”

“Journeys end in lovers meeting,” Hannibal said, “That you do love me I am nothing jealous. Every object that is loved forms the center of a paradise.”

“At this hour, lie at mercy all mine enemies,” Will said, turning and kissing Hannibal deeply, “There is throats to be cut and works to be done.”

“I’ll to my book, for yet ere supper-time must I perform much business appertaining,” Hannibal replied, “As you from crimes would pardoned be, let your indulgence set me free.”

Will chuckled. Hannibal always had the last word in their conversations, having been taught the words of the greatest writers since he was small. Will had caught up for the most part, but he had started much later in his life than Hannibal had. The only reason he had managed to get as close as he had was his eidetic memory. Without that, he would have been beyond hope.

“You’re incredibly pretentious,” Will stated, “have I ever told you that before?”

Hannibal hummed.

“I believe *you* did, upon our first meeting, as it happens,” he replied, obviously pleased with himself and with Will.

Will huffed, pulling Hannibal into another kiss. He really loved this man more than anything, and he would do anything to preserve their life together. No matter what it would take, or who he would have to kill, he would keep Hannibal. Will knew Hannibal felt the same way, and it was the most dangerous, curious dynamic of any relationship he had ever heard of.

They didn’t care, because they were creating their own paradise among the bodies that piled up around them.

“The fool has completed his task,” Hannibal stated, sliding the open tablet across the table to Will.

Hannibal did not need as much sleep as normal people. There is a bit of a spectrum of how long one needs to sleep in order to function. The least is around four hours of sleep out of every twenty four, and the most being near ten hours. Will had always thought himself lucky he needed only six, because it made it easier to pull late nights in college, and he could wake up earlier than most if he went to bed at a regular time.

Hannibal, the absolute madman, needed only four hours. He was one of the few lucky individuals who needed half the amount of sleep most people did. Will had initially wondered if the man needed to sleep at all, but he knew well enough now that he did.

It drove Will crazy at times, because he felt like he needed to know where Hannibal was at all times in order to keep him from getting himself killed. After a few discussions, Hannibal had promised not to go anywhere in the two hours Will slept longer than he. It was a small sacrifice, after all, and it made Will more comfortable.

Will looked down at the article, and was only a bit surprised to see that it was actually from Freddie Lounds' website.

The article speculated about why the FBI would be questioning the plastic surgeons, and revealed that Agent Crawford was the one running around investigating. Will didn't know how Freddie had gotten so much information, because they most definitely had *not* told Chilton enough for her to even speculate that much. Maybe Jack had gone and actually questioned more people, meaning Will and Hannibal weren't the only leak.

It was better than Will could have expected.

"That should keep Agent Crawford busy for a bit, he may not even have a chance to join us for dinner," Will said, taking a long drink of his coffee.

Hannibal hummed in agreement.

"If he truly suspects you, I think he will find the time," he replied, though neither of them really cared either way.

Will nodded.

"I admit it must seem too good to be true, having a suspect intentionally engage him in conversation, where he might learn anything about me that could be helpful, and he would have witnesses to back him up should his honesty come into question. He may even wear a wire, if he truly thinks I am his best option still," He agreed.

Hannibal smiled fondly over the table at Will.

"If you choose the evening we are to have them over, I will arrange everything," Hannibal said.

Will smiled widely and took another long drink of coffee.

"As you always do. Maybe we should invite Freddie over the same night, see how they get along together," he mused.

Hannibal tipped his head curiously, an amused glint in his eye.

"I had thought *we* were to entertain the guests, not the other way around," he said.

Will laughed softly.

"I was joking. I wouldn't want to put Jack's wife through that. I get the feeling she deserves better. If it was only Jack, then I would seriously consider it, though."

Hannibal nodded.

“Jack shall have Jill, naught shall go ill,” he said.

Will laughed.

“I’ve been doing my own research on him, and her name is Phyllis. He always calls her Bella, though,” Will said, turning his mug around in his hands, “I’m pretty sure they met in Italy. They have a very good relationship for the most part. A very nice couple.”

Hannibal hummed.

“You are questioning whether we will kill Jack,” he surmised.

Will shrugged.

“If we have to, then there’s nothing to be done about it. I’m not so set in my ways that I can’t show a little mercy every now and then.”

“The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance,” Hannibal replied coolly, standing up to serve Will some breakfast.

Will rolled his eyes.

“I know we’re early, but I have a terrible habit of running late, and Bella *insisted* we avoid that tonight,” Jack said, grinning as Hannibal ushered them into the foyer.

“Better three hours too early than a minute too late,” Hannibal replied charmingly, then turned to Bella, “It’s a pleasure to meet you at last. Since the moment I met your husband, I could not imagine a woman who could match him, though I see you do it well.”

Bella laughed politely, her smile small but genuine. Jack could tell that she was charmed and impressed.

“When Jack said you were charming and well spoken, I thought he was overreacting, but I see he wasn’t. That was a quote from the Merry Wives of Windsor, yes?”

Hannibal nodded.

“You are well read,” he replied, “please, if you will, come with me to the dining room. Will has been anxiously awaiting your arrival, and will be so pleased to meet you.”

Hannibal led them to the dining room, where Will greeted them with a smile. He was a bit withdrawn and bashful, keeping his head ducked and looking at each of them through his dark eyelashes. He was not wearing a suit as he had been the other times Jack had spoken to him. He was wearing a dark blue buttoned shirt and dark grey slacks. He wasn’t wearing a tie, and the top button of his shirt was undone. His hair fell into one neat curl over his forehead, and his eyes shone with intelligence.

“Mrs. Crawford, I am so pleased to meet you,” Will said, “I can see you are a good compliment for your husband. He chose wisely.”

Bella laughed softly again, blushing in the way she did when she was surprised and didn’t know what to say. Jack was surprised, because it wasn’t often people said they were good together when they met them, much less twice in one evening. They thought similarly to each other, if nothing else.

“You and Doctor Lecter certainly think alike. That’s nearly what he said to me when he opened the door for us. I would almost say you rehearsed it before we came,” Bella said lightly.

Jack raised an eyebrow at her in amusement.

Will smiled softly.

“Hannibal and I are often on the same page, but I assure you we didn’t *intend* to repeat ourselves. Please, come sit. Hannibal will bring the food in in just a bit,” Will replied.

Jack and Bella took their seats, sitting next to each other on the left of the head. Will sat across from Jack, on the right. Jack guessed the head of the table was left for Hannibal as he looked around the room.

“Doctor Lecter certainly has an interesting taste in décor,” he noted.

Will smiled distantly, as if it was more amusing to him than it had any right to be.

“Hannibal is certainly a man of taste, though that taste is peculiar at times,” he agreed, “I might call him a thing divine, for nothing natural I ever saw so noble.”

Bella tipped her head curiously.

“You and the doctor share an affinity for Shakespeare. What was that from?” she asked.

Jack saw a spark of interest in Bella’s eyes that he hadn’t seen for a long time. She was actually enjoying this. He thought maybe he should brush up on his own Shakespeare, if it would inspire her like this.

Will’s smile brightened a bit.

“That was from the Tempest,” he answered, “and to be honest, I learned it more out of necessity than pleasure. In order to communicate properly with Hannibal, one has to know the source material. My ability to catch up with him quickly is what served me this far into his graces.”

Jack chuckled softly.

“I’ll say. You have to have one amazing memory in order to keep all that in your head. It’s amazing.”

Will peered at Jack curiously, but with good humor. Jack couldn't help but feel there was some big thing he was missing.

"I have photographic memory, as a matter of fact. Though, I perchance am vicious in my guess, as, I confess, it is my nature's plague. Perception is a double edged blade. One has to be careful with it to avoid being cut."

Bella bit her lip thoughtfully.

"You used another one, didn't you?" she asked, "it's like some game to figure out what words you are borrowing from Shakespeare."

Will smiled brightly at her, seeming to become more relaxed in their presence.

Jack tipped his head curiously.

"*Why* is perception a double edged sword, Will?" he asked, "You don't seem to have a worry in the world."

Will huffed a laugh, and looked up as Hannibal walked in. His arms were full with plates, and some sort of understanding passed between them, as if they could communicate without speaking. Jack had never *quite* had that connection with Bella, but he had just decided that was how things were.

"It's hard to make friends with the masses if you can see all the secrets they try to hide. People don't take too kindly to finding out you can tell when they are lying."

Will said it with a mischievous grin, which Hannibal met with his own smile as he took his seat.

"Will has a unique ability," Hannibal said, sounding pleased with whatever he was about to reveal, "he possesses what I refer to as perfect empathy. He can slip into the mind of anyone he chooses. He has learned over time to tame it, when he once could not help but think like those around him. His imagination is beautiful, and has no equal."

Will blushed lightly and ducked his head once more in bashfulness.

"But, it has earned me a *life's* worth of trouble already," Will added, "and it's something I try to keep to myself as much as I can. You're a good man, Jack, and I trust you both. I don't think it will make you hate me."

Bella seemed upset at the very thought, and turned to look at Jack sternly.

Maybe they really *were* able to communicate without words.

"Of course not, Will," Jack said, "I deal with strange people every day. The behavioral science unit of the FBI is full of personality *deficients*. I think you would probably fit right in."

Will smirked as he took his first bit of food, huffing a soft breath as he did.

“The food is delicious, as always, Hannibal,” he said earning a nod from the man, “and Jack, I think you probably know this by now, but I was on the path to joining you in the FBI when I was in school.”

Jack felt a bit caught, feeling like Will knew he had been looking into him. He probably should have expected that, but most people didn’t know how the FBI worked, much less how Jack was thinking.

“I *did* know that, actually,” Jack confessed, “Your transcripts are very impressive. Degrees in Forensics *and* Psychology. As a matter of fact, why didn’t you come work for the FBI? You would have had an easy time of it.”

Will smiled and nodded in thanks.

“As I said, my perception has caused me a good amount of trouble for myself. Directly out of college, I ran into just such trouble. Doctor Lecter was so good as to find me in that time and help me *untwist* .”

“To our mutual benefit,” Hannibal added, smiling to Will, “There is much I have been able to learn from Will, and he tells me he has learned from me in return.”

“It would be hard *not* to,” Will replied, “one nearly learns from osmosis from being in the same room as you.”

The way Hannibal smiled at Will made Jack absolutely sure that he was in love with Will. There was no part of him that was not filled with infatuation, and it shone from his eyes like a beacon.

But was it reciprocated? Jack didn’t see any such evidence from Will, and it would really help Jack to discern whether he was manipulating Hannibal or not. If he truly loved the man, he may share things with him that could be incriminating, or tie him to the murders. His love may drive him to commit them in the first place. But the nature of that love would help Jack know how much of his life he shared with Hannibal.

“How did you two meet in the first place?” Jack asked, hoping to sound conversational rather than suspicious.

Hannibal turned his gaze to Jack, amusement clear in his eyes.

“We were both acquainted with the late Mason Verger. He introduced us, relatively soon before he died, as it happens. I was taken with Will the moment I saw him.”

Jack believed it. The genuine happiness in Hannibal’s eyes showed the truth of his words. He was absolutely lost to Will Graham, and Jack wasn’t sure there was any saving him.

“Bella, named so for your beauty?” Hannibal said, turning to face her pleasantly.

Bella smiled widely.

“My name is Phyllis, but Jack only calls me that when we disagree,” she said, turning to Jack in another cue he supposed was something they could share nonverbally.

“We were both stationed in Italy,” Jack continued for her, smiling at the memories, “I in army, she was NATO staff. All the Italian men kept calling her ‘Bella, Bella, Bella’, and I wanted her to be my Bella.”

Jack saw Bella duck her head gently, always bashful at the retelling. He loved to see her smile, and it was becoming more rare these days.

4

Chapter Summary

Continuation of dinner

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was deciding he really *did* hope they wouldn't have to kill Jack. He and Bella really were a very nice couple, and their story was endearing. He was a good man, and the world would be a worse place without him.

"A wonderful start to what looks to be a wonderful relationship," Will said, smiling at them, "but I imagine your work is hard on you, Jack. One sees more devils than vast Hell can hold."

Jack looked at Will curiously, as if trying to read something in his eyes. Will internally laughed at the idea. He was quite possibly the only person who did not betray themselves by expression, unless of course he decided to. He had learned years ago how to keep his thoughts to himself, and no one could read him.

"I see the worst in people every day," Jack agreed, "but even when every day is something new, I never find myself surprised."

Will smirked.

"When devils will the blackest sins put on, they do suggest at first with heavenly shows," Hannibal said, "you should always be wary of those closest to you, or you are bound to not only be surprised, but betrayed. Luckily for you, Agent Crawford, the FBI has very strict screening procedures."

Jack nodded, but he looked thoughtful, as if Hannibal had given him some sort of idea. Will had a feeling he knew what it was, but he couldn't help being curious.

"Even then, a few people slip through the cracks," Jack said, "but one gets a sense for that kind of thing after a few years."

"One may smile and smile and be a villain," Will stated in agreement, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Bella looked like she was enjoying the game she had made of trying to identify the origin of each quote.

“Hamlet,” she said.

Will smiled and nodded.

“Not exactly in their place, but both from that play,” he answered, “Do you read often, Mrs. Crawford?”

Bella smiled.

“I used to. I had to do *something* while Jack was away. Now, I mostly work. Perhaps I’ll pick up a book again soon. You’ve reminded me of how much I enjoy it.”

Will’s smile widened. He seemed to be making a very good impression on Jack’s wife. She may even vouch for him later if Jack was still suspicious. *That* would be an interesting thing to see, though he hoped it would not put a strain on their relationship.

“Will, I’m very curious about your empathy,” Jack cut in, “how exactly does that work?”

Will hummed thoughtfully.

“Time travels at different speeds for different people,” he said, “I can tell you who time strolls for, who it gallops for, and who it stops cold for.”

Jack stared at him, uncomprehending.

“As you like it,” Bella explained, “right?”

Will nodded politely.

“Do forgive me, Jack,” he said, “Hannibal has very much corrupted my manner of speech. I can hardly say a thing without repeating what Shakespeare has written.”

Hannibal cut a bite of meat and smiled.

“His words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes,” he said pleasantly.

Will laughed, unable to stop himself. He had actually been trying to find a moment when he could use that in reference to Hannibal, but it sounded just as hilarious from him.

“Hannibal especially enjoys quoting Much Ado About Nothing,” Will explained with a grin, turning to address Jack, “because it has always been my favorite. When we first met, it was the only one I could reliably quote back to him.”

Jack nodded, as if he had just begun to understand.

“You two have a remarkable understanding between you,” he said, “I can’t wrap my head around what you are saying half the time, but you both know exactly what the other means.”

Will just smiled, knowing Jack was still trying to find something *suspicious* about him.

“Don’t pretend you are so ignorant of it,” Will chided pleasantly, “I’ve seen how you know from a single look what Bella wants you to say. Hannibal and I are not as special as you would make us out to be.”

Jack huffed a soft laugh and shrugged. He took a bite of food, perhaps as a distraction for himself, or a signal to change topics.

“Doctor Lecter, you really do know how to prepare a meal,” he said, though his tone was all false admiration, “this is the best food I have eaten in years.”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, though he was amused.

“Neither of you cook?” he asked, looking between Jack and Bella.

Bella laughed softly.

“I do, but not very well. There are people like you, Doctor, who have a talent for that kind of thing. I’m afraid I’m just not one of them,” she said.

Hannibal smiled.

“We are all given our share of wealth, whether that be in the mind, in the hand, or in the pocket,” Hannibal said pleasantly, “there is no need to feel ashamed of a lack, unless it motivates you to gain.”

Will shook his head softly at Hannibal, unable to keep from smiling a bit. Then, he decided to get some information from Jack if he could.

“Agent Crawford,” Will said, “how has your investigation been going? Unless you’re not allowed to say. I just happen to be curious, now that I’ve been interrogated.”

Jack looked almost like a deer in the headlights, as if he hadn’t expected to be asked.

“Technically, you were interviewed. It’s not an interrogation unless I arrest you,” he said, “but you’re right that I can’t give you any details.”

Bella seemed surprised to hear that Will had been a suspect, but she didn’t say anything. Apparently they didn’t discuss work that often with each other.

“We saw an article stating that you have been asking around in the plastic surgery field for any leads,” Hannibal said, adding on to Will’s inquiry, “I was unaware you had any other suspects aside from Will.”

Jack winced, as if they were plucking out his hairs one at a time.

“Well, the best way to solve a case is to not allow yourself to become too focused on any single suspect. The person who seems the most likely often isn’t who we are looking for. I would be a fool to let myself get distracted like that.”

Will smiled.

“Yes you would,” he said, “have you spoken to Doctor Chilton? He’s quite the character.”

Jack furrowed his brow slightly, likely trying to decide how best to answer that.

“I did speak to him once, though I didn’t find anything out that would aid in the investigation,” he said carefully.

Will chuckled.

“I would have been surprised if you had,” he said, “Fredrick has the unique ability to say many words that mean absolutely nothing. He is not a reliable source for anything, much less a surgery. You must have looked into his history of *lawsuits* .”

Jack nodded, but he was frowning. He looked at Will like there was something under his skin that had almost revealed itself.

“I did. Curiously, I didn’t find any incidents of that sort in *your* past, Doctor Lecter,” he said, turning to Hannibal, “I have never met a doctor who has not been sued at least once.”

Hannibal smiled and met Jack’s eyes for a moment.

“Often, lawsuits are more founded on the patient’s opinion of their doctor than the actual quality of the work,” he said, “I do what I can to be pleasant and honest with my clients, and I give each of them my best work. Even those who have not been satisfied with the result have had no reason to be upset with me.”

Jack smiled, but it was clear he was putting on a polite face.

“You really are very charming, Doctor. I can’t imagine thinking poorly of you.”

Will wanted to laugh. Jack was trying to appeal to Hannibal’s better nature, ignorant of the fact that he had none. He wanted to have Hannibal feel obligated to tell him what Will had been doing. Jack was in for a surprise.

“Good works are better than bad strokes,” Will said in agreement, “but so many outwards shows be least themselves. The world is still deceived by ornament.”

Jack may very well have his face stuck into an expression of perpetual confusion. He could not understand what it was Will was saying, and that was exactly why Will had said it.

“The Merchant of Venice,” Will supplied, giving Bella a nod respectfully, “and before that, Julius Caesar. I only mean that even those that are least suspicious are often at fault. Take Doctor Chilton, for example. Upon meeting him, you might not think he is capable of much of *anything* , and then you find out he is a surgeon who somehow manages to steal money from his clients and retain a reputation as successful.”

Will grinned widely, earning a huff of laughter from Hannibal.

“I apologize for Will,” Hannibal said, though he was clearly having a hard time not bursting into laughter himself, “while he is incredibly talented and intelligent, he has a disposition to

be displeased with those that bear false witness. He tends to be rather rude towards liars."

Will shrugged off-handedly.

"That's another thing I think we share," Bella said, offering a smile to Will, "I was worried I would be the only person here that has a bit too sharp of a tongue. You likely pull it off better than I do, though."

Will grinned brightly at her. Jack pressed his lips together, clearly displeased that Bella was growing to like Will so much. She didn't know that he was still a suspect. Much less Jack's main one.

"I'm glad you think so," Will said, "It's hard to find company these days who appreciate a quick wit. We work by wit and not by witchcraft."

Bella huffed her own soft laugh and nodded.

"What kind of trouble did you run into from your empathy?" Jack asked, still trying to learn something incriminating.

"Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold," Hannibal answered on Will's behalf, "there were people who saw only his ability to detect lies and traitors. They know well enough now, that he is not an object to be bought and sold."

Will nodded, biting his tongue to keep himself from saying something terrible about Mason Verger. He didn't want to incriminate himself for a case that had long ago been closed and forgotten.

"That must have been very hard on you," Jack said, trying his hardest to sound sympathetic.

Will wondered if he was this obviously false when he spoke to the families of dead people. It wouldn't serve him well, but Will hadn't been able to find any information detailing unhappy families apart from when they wanted answers he couldn't give them.

"I think I turned out alright despite their meddling," Will said, allowing a wry smile to pull at his lips, "and with Hannibal's help in the aftermath, of course."

"Of course," Jack agreed, nodding to Hannibal politely.

"I would never take much credit," Hannibal parried, "even when I had thoughts of going into the field of psychiatry, I knew the majority of the reparations would have to be done by the patient."

Will saw his chance and he took it.

"Cans't thou not minister to a mind diseased, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, raze out the written troubles of the brain, and with some sweet oblivious antidote cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart?" he asked.

Hannibal caught his gaze and raised an eyebrow, amused more than he had been before.

“The patient must minister unto himself,” he replied without missing a beat.

Jack shook his head in wonder, completely out of his depth. Will could see that he was just now beginning to really understand *how* far out of his depth he was. Jack was unable to even start to comprehend the true meaning of Will and Hannibal’s actions or words. There were secrets he would never learn, and he didn’t even know they were capable of being learned.

“I believe that was Macbeth,” Bella said, shaking her own head with a smile, “I can’t imagine how you managed to remember that entire thing,” she said to Will, then turned to Hannibal, “and you had the reply ready, as if you knew he would say it.”

Hannibal and Will exchanged their own amused expressions, and Will caught the look of envy Jack shot them. It seemed Jack wanted to be able to communicate with Bella the same way Hannibal and Will could.

“It was,” Will agreed, “you certainly have your own good memory in your skull. Most people Hannibal introduces me to can’t recognize if he’s quoting Shakespeare or Euripides. He’s a fan of classic authors.”

Bella laughed lightly.

“I don’t know if I’d be able to identify Euripides if you quoted him, but I am really enjoying Shakespeare. It’s like a quiz in a literature class.”

“Even in one’s adulthood, it’s serviceable to often test your mind,” Hannibal said, “I often entertain myself by stretching my knowledge. Will is one of the best companions for such an activity.”

Bella and Will both laughed at that, earning a bright smile from Hannibal when he looked at Will.

“Having the memory I do, my head is full of random trivia,” Will explained, addressing Jack, who seemed to be feeling ostracized, “I know a bit about everything, making it so I can always find something I know that someone else doesn’t.”

Jack smiled, seeming genuinely grateful that Will decided to reintroduce him into the conversation.

“I’m sure there are plenty of people that way in the BAU over at Quantico,” Will continued pleasantly, “knowing a bit about everything sure makes it easier to profile a criminal, in my experience. Easier to get into their headspace if you’re not forging a new path through your own.”

Jack tipped his head.

“In your *experience* ,” he noted, “what kind of experience do you have with profiling criminals?”

Will huffed.

“Don’t try to play me, Jack. I can always tell when someone is lying, or when they’re trying to cover something up,” Will said calmly, “I know you’ve looked at every bit of my records you could find. That’s bound to include a good amount of work I did while in school. You already know I have degrees in both Forensics and Psychology. I hope you didn’t assume that was some sort of fluke. I know a thing or two about the justice system, and those that work against it.”

Chapter End Notes

Quotes this chapter:
"One sees more devils than vast hell can hold" -Midsummer Night's Dream
"When devils will the blackest suits put on, they do suggest at first with heavenly shows" -Othello
"One may smile and smile and be a villain" -Hamlet
"There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy" -Hamlet
"Time travels at different speeds for different people. I can tell you who time strolls for, who it gallops for, and who it stops cold for" -As You Like It
"His words are such a fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes" -Much Ado About Nothing
"Good works are better than bad strokes" -Julius Caesar
"So many outward shows be least themselves. The world is still deceived by ornament" -The Merchant Of Venice
"We work by wit and not by witchcraft" -Othello
"Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold" -As You Like It
"Cans't thou not minister to a mind diseased, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, raze out the written troubles of the brain, and with some sweet oblivious antidote cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff whish weighs upon the heart?_The paitent must minister unto himself" -Macbeth

5

Chapter Summary

Uh... a little Margot anyone? And a dash of Freddie Lounds for the plot development. Enjoy<3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The gentleness of all the gods go with thee,” Will said pleasantly as Jack and Bella made their way out the door.

The couple waved, though Bella seemed much more pleased with the evening than her husband. Jack still seemed confused, and unhappy that he hadn’t managed to get Will to incriminate himself. Will actually thought Jack might be wondering if he had the wrong person in mind in the first place. Wouldn’t *that* be entertaining.

Hannibal closed the door softly behind them, and smiled at Will.

“Was it as entertaining as you had hoped?” he asked.

Will hummed in agreement, stepping up and pulling Hannibal flush with him.

“Even more,” he said, “I hadn’t expected Bella to follow our words so well. It’s always fun to have someone who can *almost* understand. I think she liked us.”

Hannibal huffed a laugh and nuzzled into Will’s hair, wrapping him up in his strong arms.

“I think she was charmed by *you* ,” Hannibal agreed, “If she were not so clearly enamored with her husband, I would have nearly felt threatened.”

Will laughed.

“I told you they are a very nice couple. I hope Jack keeps out of our business so we don’t have to kill him. Despite how much she loves him, I can tell she is keeping something from him. Something big.”

Hannibal nodded.

“I believe I may know what it is she is keeping from him,” he said.

Will tipped his head curiously.

Will carried the basket in the crook of one arm as he studied the shelves of vegetables. After all these years, he had learned how to buy ingredients well enough. Every now and then he would make a mistake, but it was easy to get Hannibal to forgive him.

Will was keenly aware that he was being followed, but he had planned as much, so he continued as if he was oblivious to it. He picked out the proper food for the dinner Hannibal had planned, and made his way to purchase them.

He was curious to see when his pursuer would approach him. He hadn't allowed himself to be followed only to get away from them without having a conversation.

Freddie Lounds *finally* jogged up to him as he was placing the paper bag of food in the back seat.

"Mister Graham," she called, "can I speak with you for a moment? I heard Jack Crawford was investigating you in relation to the recent deaths of some of Doctor Lecter's competitors."

Will didn't meet her eyes, keeping his head ducked down and made sure his hands fidgeted enough to make it clear he was nervous.

"I don't think Agent Crawford suspects me any more," he said softly, watching warily as Freddie moved her recording device closer to pick up the words, "but he's just doing his job."

Freddie smiled, clearly trying to broadcast sympathy.

"It's true that several of Doctor Lecter's competitors have been found dead recently. Do you have anything to say on the matter?" she pressed, her tone gentle as if she were working with a skittish animal.

Will shrugged.

"There are lots of unsatisfied clients in the field of plastic surgery," he said, pulling away a bit as if he might make a run for it, "I don't think they are necessarily connected. It looks like whoever killed them really had something against them. They look too personal to be a *political* move."

Freddie nodded, smiling reassuringly. It was clear Will's act was working. She thought he was an innocent, wrongly suspected, easy target for her particular brand of ambush.

"And you're qualified to make those kinds of observations, right?" she asked, "You have degrees in Forensics *and* Psychology. You were once on the path to becoming a criminal profiler, right?"

Will nodded, offering her a polite smile and only glancing up for a heartbeat.

"Yeah. I actually wanted to work in the FBI," he agreed, "but of course, I'm not. I don't want to say I have the authority to say anything about the case. I'm sure Jack knows what he's doing."

Freddie nodded again, a movement meant to encourage whoever she's talking with to keep talking.

"But you do know what you're talking about. Your college professors called you a genius, saying you were the most intelligent student they had ever had. And you never got into any fights or showed any violent tendencies. Why do you think Jack Crawford suspected you?"

Will huffed a soft laugh, ducking his head further and keeping his hands busy by fidgeting.

"He's just doing his job," he said, "Hannibal and I are *easy* suspects, since some of the victims were his competitors. I'm sure Jack will catch the killer, whoever it is. Now, if you don't mind, Miss Lounds, I have groceries in the car. I need to be getting home."

Freddie looked like she wanted to object, but Will closed the car door and started the engine, drowning out whatever it was she wanted to say. He pulled away, and smiled to himself.

That had gone *very* well.

While he had gone out of his way to never speak with Freddie Lounds before, he had decided to let her catch him this time. She would help him to have the reputation as a poor, wronged, insecure man who was just private and shy. Someone who could not have hurt a fly.

Will headed home, pleased with how the day had turned out so far.

Jack stared at the note. He was angry, but he wasn't sure with whom.

- *Please ask Bella about her illness. Cancer is not something that should be fought on one's own.*-

Jack *could* be angry at the author of the note. Whoever it was, they were clearly attempting to distract him, or to drive a wedge between him and his wife. He could be angry with *himself* , because it was working. He had known Bella was hiding something, but she hadn't told him what it was yet. He had wanted it to be her decision.

Jack could be angry with Bella, because if this was true it meant she had been hiding something as serious as cancer.

What Jack really could not figure out, was who would know about it before him, and would feel the desire to tell him in this way. If Bella was not telling him, who would she have told? Or had someone managed to find it out without her knowing, and now were trying to use it against them?

But, what if it was a lie? What if Bella was really fine, and this note only served to instill doubt in Jack's mind?

Jack ground his teeth together as he worked it all over in his mind. He wanted to distract himself from it, and there was only one thing in his life that might be able to do that.

Jack drove to Lecter's clinic. He knew Hannibal was likely to be busy when he showed up, but that was by design. He wanted to talk to the secretary.

In all his research, Jack had learned that Hannibal Lecter liked to keep a small circle of close coworkers in his place of practice. He didn't hire scores of nurses and receptionists. He had one secretary who minded the front of the business, and a handful of assistants that he knew well. Jack was curious to see what Lecter's employees thought of Will Graham.

Margot Verger smiled politely up at Jack when he walked in.

"Hello, sir. What can I do for you today?" she asked.

There was something peculiar about her. Margot Verger had been left without a penny after the fire that killed her brother. The world had certainly not been going in her favor during that time, seeing as she was not included in the will unless she had provided a male heir. She hadn't, and upon Mason's death, the entire fortune had been donated to the Baptist church.

"I'm Agent Crawford with the FBI," Jack supplied, showing her his ID for good measure, "I was wondering if I could ask some questions."

Margot surveyed the badge with only mild interest before she looked back up to him.

"I'm sorry, but Doctor Lecter is currently in surgery. I can make an appointment for you if you like, Agent Crawford," she said.

Jack smiled and shook his head.

"I was actually hoping to speak with *you* , Miss Verger, as Doctor Lecter's *only* secretary. You seem to have a lot of his trust."

Margot smiled, but it was still just a polite thing. She didn't really find enjoyment in his compliment.

"I'm sure you can," she replied, "but if you ask me anything regarding Doctor Lecter's practice, I must insist you bring a warrant for the information."

It was as if every member of Hannibal's clinic was well trained in regards to dealing with law enforcement. It rubbed Jack the wrong way, though he couldn't quite explain why.

"That's fine," he said, continuing to smile in an attempt to soothe her concerns, "I didn't intend to. I was hoping to ask you about his partner. Will Graham?"

Margot tipped her head, her strawberry blonde hair falling over her shoulder as if it had rehearsed it. Why the hell were all these people so well put together?

"I don't know how helpful I can be on that ground," Margot said, standing up, "but I can at least offer you a chair while we talk. Coffee?"

Jack nodded in thanks.

“Yes on the chair, no thank you for the coffee. I’ve had my fair share already this morning,” he said pleasantly.

Margot smiled lightly, almost seeming more relaxed now that she knew what the questions were going to be about. She walked around the desk and showed Jack to a pair of comfortable arm chairs.

“I’ll have to answer the phone if it rings, and return to the desk if anyone walks in,” she explained as they sat, “unless of course this is an official interview, or you’re putting me under arrest.”

Jack laughed softly and leaned back comfortably in the chair.

“No worries. This isn’t official. I’m just curious by nature.”

Margot nodded politely.

“Then what would you like to know? I’ll help as much as I can.”

Jack nodded and thought about it for a moment.

“I guess the first thing I wanted to know actually happens to be about you,” he confessed, “How did you come to find this position in the clinic?”

Margot took a deep breath and looked toward the front windows. Her gaze grew distant and cold, but almost detached.

“I was left penniless after the fire, which I am sure you know about,” she began, “but I knew Doctor Lecter from when he had helped my brother. Mason liked to collect people, in a way, and Doctor Lecter was the only person I really felt I could come to. He offered to provide me with an apartment and this job. Once I got back on my feet, I started paying for the apartment myself. He’s a considerate employer. I decided to stay on as long as he will let me, and he seems to think I do a good enough job.”

Jack nodded. He had expected the story to be something like that. Hannibal was the sort to be very charitable, on and off the record. Jack had found many people willing to swear on their lives that he was a *saint* . Having met the man, Jack wasn’t sure what to think about him. He didn’t seem one to throw money at the less fortunate, or even take much notice of them, but he wasn’t cold or unfeeling either. He was an enigma, but nothing about him was distasteful.

“Thank you. Now, when did you first meet Will Graham?” Jack asked.

Margot huffed a soft laugh.

“Long after I first met Doctor Lecter,” she answered, “but before the fire. Mason had… *solicited* his help with a few business dealings, and I met him by default. I worked for my brother in a lot of things. I knew a lot of his business partners.”

Jack nodded, but he frowned.

“What sort of business did Will help with?” he asked, “I was under the impression he was going through some hard times around then.”

Margot scoffed.

“Working for my brother *qualifies* as hard times,” she said, “I wasn’t actually involved with the things Mister Graham helped with, but I can assure you, my brother was nowhere near a saint. If someone could be taken advantage of, he would find it out and exploit it. Mister Graham is probably one of the lucky ones. Doctor Lecter helped him get out of that before too much damage was done.”

Jack hummed thoughtfully.

So far, all the stories lined up, but they had very little by way of detail. He couldn’t find a single thing that actually told him what Will had been doing in the years he had been practically off the grid. He hadn’t left a trace of himself behind, which wasn’t typical for someone who was just going through “hard times”.

“What was your first impression of Will?” he asked, “when you first met him, what did you think of him?”

Margot nodded thoughtfully.

“I knew Mason was going to ruin his life, so I tried not to think about him too much,” she said wryly, “Mister Graham was not in a very good place when he started working for my brother. I thought it was a shame, because he’s clearly very intelligent, and he had his entire life ahead of him before my brother got his hands on him.”

Jack pursed his lips.

Everyone seemed to think of Will as a lost puppy, that Hannibal had rescued and adopted. He was just a poor, helpless thing that had been saved by Lecter.

But Jack was sure there was something else to him. There was something dark hiding behind his fancy words and bright smiles. Something lurking behind his eyes.

“I’m sure you know him better, now that you have been working for Doctor Lecter and him for a few years now,” Jack suggested, hoping desperately to find out something to support his theory.

Margot smiled softly, seeming to actually be fond of Will for whatever reason. It made Jack’s blood boil.

“Mister Graham is actually much more personable than Doctor Lecter, when not in a large gathering,” she said, “He’s easier to talk to. Doctor Lecter does very well as a *socialite* , but Mister Graham is closer to a friend than he is. That being said, Mister Graham is not Doctor Lecter’s partner in *business* .”

Jack blinked in surprise.

“Oh? Then what are they partners in?” he asked, taken aback.

Margot smiled mischievously.

“In *life* , Agent Crawford,” she answered simply.

Jack laughed softly.

“Oh, of course. I’m sorry,” he said quickly, “and what are your thoughts on that matter? How do you think all of that is going?”

Margot hummed, though she seemed entirely amused at the question.

“If you’ve ever seen them together, you would have to be blind to miss how in love Doctor Lecter is with Mister Graham,” she said slyly.

Jack nodded.

“I don’t doubt the truth of that,” he explained, “I’ve spoken with them, and seen them together a few times. I’m sure Doctor Lecter really does care for him as much as he claims. I’m more curious about *Will’s* feelings in the matter.”

Margot raised an eyebrow at him, her green eyes sparkling with some secret humor.

“You don’t trust that he really loves Doctor Lecter?” she asked, though she didn’t really sound surprised, just curious.

Jack shrugged, playing it off as a casual concern.

“I can’t say I’m sure,” he replied, “Will doesn’t seem to show his emotions the same way as the doctor. The first time I met him, he was very reserved and anxious, but since then I haven’t seemed to be able to catch him acting that way again. I feel like I can’t really be sure he’s acting the way he feels.”

Margot nodded. She seemed to actually understand what he was saying, and what he meant by it. He was beginning to think his experience with Will wasn’t unique.

That would make him feel foolish.

“Mister Graham is typically anxious, especially if you seem like someone important or if he’s not with Doctor Lecter. Lecter is a very calming presence for him, and they really balance each other out,” Margo explained, “The first time I saw Mister Graham after he had gotten out of his trouble, he basically hid behind Doctor Lecter the entire time. But like I said, we’re friends now. More so than I am with Doctor Lecter.”

Jack frowned and sighed softly.

“And I suppose his tendency to-”

“The Shakespeare?” Margot cut in with a knowing smile.

Jack huffed a laugh and nodded.

“Yeah. That’s something Doctor Lecter started. He’s a fan of classical authors, and it’s a bit of a game between them. They like to talk to each other without anyone else knowing what they’re saying. Sometimes they even talk in different languages to each other, but their favorite is definitely Shakespeare.”

Jack smiled, but he was internally watching his entire theory crumble. He had wanted to learn something that would prove Will was just a phenomenal actor, so he could justify his suspicion of the man.

“That’s an interesting aspect of their relationship,” he admitted, “and I’m glad they seem to be doing so well. Will must be very fortunate to have found someone who could help him out of his hard times.”

Margot nodded.

“Doctor Lecter has a way of doing that.”

Chapter End Notes

I think Margot's cute, and I wanted to assure you all she didn't die in the "accident" like her brother. She's doing fine!

The single quote from this chapter ("the gentleness of all the gods go with thee") is actually from Twelfth Night. How serendipitous of me XD
Thanks for reading <3

6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I see your resolve to stay away from Miss Lounds has crumbled,” Hannibal noted, stirring dinner smartly while Will watched.

Will hummed, taking a sip of the wine Hannibal had poured for them.

“I decided it would be beneficial to the cause,” he said at length, “and I made sure she feels she cornered me, rather than arranging anything. Even if Jack were to ask her about me, he wouldn’t be able to learn anything that could put us in danger.”

Hannibal smiled over at Will, though he had a raised eyebrow in that way that was just shy of teasing. Will loved that.

“I never doubted you, dearest,” Hannibal said as Will walked up behind him, “I have always admired your ability to plan for every angle.”

Hannibal lifted a spoon to Will’s lips, and Will accepted the taste as he set his chin on Hannibal’s shoulder. He hummed pleasantly at the flavors, wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s waist.

“Are you trying to get me into a better mood for some reason?” Will asked suspiciously, “you don’t make Cajun food often.”

Hannibal offered a non-committal sound as he continued to work on the gumbo.

“Margot has informed me that Agent Crawford came to the clinic today,” he said, “he was interested in asking her about you.”

Will nuzzled into Hannibal’s neck a bit, breathing in his cologne and natural scents.

“He is very determined,” Will decided, “but I’m starting to think he’s not going to be a threat to us. He hasn’t found anything yet, and he’s running out of people to ask. He can’t do anything with his suspicions unless he finds someone willing to confirm them, or evidence that can.”

Hannibal pressed a kiss to Will’s hair with a smile.

“Dinner is nearly done, though I cannot finish it if you are clinging to me so,” he said playfully.

Will bit Hannibal gently for the tease, but he pulled away to watch as Hannibal finished. He took another drink from the wine, letting the liquid cover his tongue as he unabashedly stared at his partner.

“Are you disappointed?” Hannibal asked as he served them each up a bowl of the food.

Will shrugged.

“Yes and no,” he answered, “I’m glad I won’t have to kill him, but I expected more from him. He’s the head of the BAU.”

Hannibal nodded in understanding as he picked up their bowls and carried them to the dining room. Will picked up the wine glasses and followed.

“He must be fairly distracted by now with concern for his wife,” Hannibal offered as they sat, “I’m certain he received the note before he came to the clinic.”

Will nodded as he took a bite of the gumbo.

“Perhaps,” he agreed, “but surely he hasn’t allowed himself to ignore what his instincts are telling him.”

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh and smiled at Will.

“Not many are as attuned to their instincts as we are, Mangusteli,” he pointed out.

Will sighed softly.

“I suppose so,” he said, “but it’s really a shame to see. While we may have reached our potential, there are so many that never will, simply because of the standards they hold themselves to in society.”

Hannibal chuckled and pulled one of Will’s hands up into a kiss.

“Your compassion for others never ceases to dazzle me,” he whispered, closing his eyes and letting his lips brush over the skin of Will’s hand.

Will huffed softly, rolling his eyes fondly.

“Says the man who collects less fortunate souls,” he shot back, reclaiming his hand gently.

Hannibal smiled.

“I see no reason not to gain as many allies as possible,” he said, “and when one feels they are indebted to you, they are more likely to remain loyal. I believe my point can be illustrated rather well with Miss Verger just from today.”

Will smiled and shook his head.

“I actually *like* Margot,” he said, “not to mention she was only less fortunate because of *us* .”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow at Will as he sipped his wine.

“You believe she was as happy as we are when she was under her brother’s thumb?” he asked.

Will sighed.

“Alright, fine. I admit she might be better off now than she was *then* , but that doesn’t change the fact that we probably could have done something to help her keep the estate when Mason died,” he said.

Hannibal hummed in thought, a wicked spark in his eye.

“In what way, Will?” he asked, “would you have offered to help her produce an heir?”

Will flushed and he snapped his head up to stare at Hannibal.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Hannibal,” he said.

Hannibal blinked, feigning innocence.

“I meant no disrespect, Will,” he said sweetly, “I only wish to know what you would have done for her. You have not offered an alternative.”

Will had to bite his tongue to keep himself from saying something that would end up making them end dinner too soon. He really liked Hannibal’s gumbo.

“Hannibal!”
Hannibal had Will pinned to the wall, and they were both panting roughly. Will had stopped fighting back in earnest, but was still speaking with his partner.

“Do you know what I would have *done* , Will?” Hannibal breathed into Will’s ear, making him shiver at the dark tone.

“No,” Will said, keening as Hannibal let his teeth scrape along his pulse.

“Yes you do,” Hannibal reprimanded, “You always know what I would do. Clever boy you are, tell me what I would have done.”

Will felt his heart about to beat right out of his chest, and he felt too hot in his skin.

“No,” he said again, almost unable to think of anything else to say.

Hannibal hummed, running his tongue over Will’s throat and making his eyelids flutter.

“Do you want me to stop?” Hannibal asked.

“No!” Will replied quickly, “Please Hannibal.”

Hannibal snarled, pressing harder against Will.

“I would have killed her,” he said, “I would have killed her and the child. You are mine, and no one else is allowed to have even part of you. Since the day I set eyes on you, you have been mine.”

Will was trembling, but he couldn't stop the grin that broke over his face.

"You are just as much mine," he said softly, turning his head to nip at Hannibal's ear.

Hannibal growled lowly, a predatory sound as he pulled back and tugged Will into the bed.

Despite the intrusion the investigation has been on his personal life, and the toll it must have taken on his delicate mental health, Will Graham has graciously taken to defending the actions of Agent Jack Crawford regarding the recent deaths in Baltimore society.

Graham, partner to Doctor Lecter, has the reputation of being unsocial despite his appearances at gatherings on the arm of his partner. He has explained to many of his acquaintances that he had long since been diagnosed with anxiety and an empathy disorder, causing him distress in many circumstances. The mere mention of the investigation made him further shrink into himself, showing just how unlikely it is that he would be capable of doing anything to harm another, much less murder several people in his social circle.

Was Agent Crawford wrong to interrogate Will Graham in the first place? Has the FBI stooped so low as to use scare tactics on innocent potential witnesses?

Jack stared at the screen, trying to reconcile the rage he felt with the response he logically should have to the article.

Freddie Lounds was casting doubt on Jack's capacity to do his job correctly. She was decidedly framing him as the villain when there were real criminals in the world to be caught. Will Graham could very well be one of them, and she had decided to rally around him, bringing with her anyone that was foolish enough to believe what she wrote.

A *stunning* percentage of the Baltimore population, unfortunately.

Jack knew he had no right to be angry with Will. The man had probably been cornered while out and about, not responsible for what Freddie wrote in the slightest. For all Jack knew, Freddie could have made it all up. Will had been careful to keep out of her business, and might be too stubborn to respond to the article's quotes of him.

Despite logic telling Jack he should speak with Will in a calm, respectful atmosphere, he wanted to wring the man's neck.

The fact that he had asked his wife and had her confirm that she did indeed have cancer was doing nothing to calm his nerves.

Lung cancer. Bella had lung cancer, and she hadn't wanted to *tell* Jack. She was embarrassed when she admitted it, but she hadn't done him the disservice of having lied to his face about it. Jack didn't know what to do anymore. Bella was sick, Will Graham had the entire world wrapped around his finger, Jack had no evidence to convict him, and now the general public had been turned against him.

Bella was sick .

Jack felt his heart sink right down to his toes as he remembered the way she had tipped her head up defiantly as they discussed her cancer. The way she had asked him to remember her as herself, rather than the weak thing she feared becoming as her illness progressed.

Jack didn't ever allow himself to cry at work. He didn't. No matter what was going on with the killers or with his own life, he didn't cry at work. It wasn't a place where one could look for sympathy, nor hide away in grief. It was a place to ignore the feelings of those parts of life in order to find the people who caused them.

Jack didn't cry at work.

But he did. Just this once.

"How did it go with Tavin Radburn?" Hannibal asked, continuing to write in his perfect copperplate font.

Will hummed, walking up behind him and wrapping his arms around his shoulders. He pressed a kiss to Hannibal's jaw and watched his careful scrawl.

"Butchered like a lamb, squalling with fright, and the throat held taut for the gashing knife," he said softly.

Hannibal turned his head and pressed a kiss to the back of Will's hand, which was laying on his shoulder.

"One half of me is yours, the other half is yours, mine own, I would say, but if mine then yours, and so all yours," he said.

Will smiled against Hannibal's neck, breathing deeply. His blood was still rushing in his veins from the kill, and Hannibal's scent always managed to calm him.

"I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two and wear my dagger with the braver grace," he replied, "What's he, then, that says I play the villain? When this advice is free I give and honest."

Hannibal smiled and turned his chair to face Will. He pulled Will down into his lap, kissing him deeply.

"A wicked man who is also eloquent seems the most guilty of them all. He'll cut your throat as bold as brass, because he can dress up murder in handsome words."

Will closed his eyes and brushed his lips over Hannibal's high cheekbone.

"Are you complimenting me?" he mumbled, "calling me eloquent and dangerous?"

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh and nipped at Will's jaw.

“You are the one who called yourself *pretty* just now,” he pointed out, “which I would have called vain if I did not agree so ardently. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge.”

Will laughed, muffling the sound in Hannibal’s shoulder.

“You have had your revenge on the Verger estate. What other revenge do you need?” He asked.

Hannibal hummed.

“I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes.”

Will tisked at the man, sliding his tie free from his crisp blue collar. Hannibal was romantic every moment of their life together, but he was also silly.

“You’re not allowed to die. Not while I’m still around.”

Hannibal reached up to pull Will’s tie away as well. While they both dressed well now, Will having grown fond of the suits as a way to fit in with Hannibal’s crowd, they never remained dressed long once they were in the same room together alone.

Will didn’t mind that at all.

Chapter End Notes

Quotes this chapter:
"Butchered like a lamb, squalling with fright, and the throat held taut for the gashing knife" -Euripides
"One half of me is yours, the other half is yours, mine own, I would say, but if mine then yours, and so all yours" -The Merchant of Venice
"I’ll prove the prettier fellow of the two and wear my dagger with the braver grace" -The Merchant of Venice
"What’s he, then, that says I play the villain? When this advice is free I give and honest" -Othello
"A wicked man who is also eloquent seems the most guilty of them all. He’ll cut your throat as bold as brass, because he can dress up murder in handsome words" -Euripides
"If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge" -The Merchant of Venice
"I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes" -Much Ado About Nothing

7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was another body.

Jack was starting to think he should just retire early and spend time with Bella instead of allowing himself to be so tortured by this killer. Maybe they could go to Italy, where she could remember why she had married him. They could return to their beginning, even though it would feel like an end. Jack wasn't sure he wanted to go through that, but he wanted to do something meaningful for her. Something to help them reconnect.

But there was another body, and a killer on the loose. Jack didn't have any leads, or evidence to help him get there.

Tavin Radburn was not remembered fondly. Not by his patients or his employees. He had been rude, unfair, and in many cases hateful. Now that the man was dead, Jack found that he had been blackmailing almost everyone who he had come to meet. He had a way of learning things about his employees that he would use against them, and the anesthesia he used on his patients caused them to speak far too freely. There was an investigation into his dealings, now, and it was getting in the way of Jack's investigation into his death.

The scene was not one Jack had been pleased to walk into that morning, though there hadn't been a single one he really had wanted to see. It was a part of the job. It wasn't pleasant most of the time, but it was validating.

It was just.

But justice was slow, and often more blind than Jack would have preferred. He didn't want to have to wait for the lights to be turned on in order to see. He wanted to have the light switch within his reach, so he could illuminate the truth and lead justice to it. He didn't want to also be groping in the dark.

But maybe he was just getting to the point where he needed to let someone with more nimble fingers, and more agile feet, to take the lead. He might just be at the time in his life where he needed to let justice take its course, without his help.

He would have to talk to Bella about it. Any decision he made, he wanted her to consult on it. He didn't want to drive her farther away by making such a drastic change without her. He would not leave her behind, and he prayed that she would do the same for him.

Tavin Radburn had been punished for his sins, and it was possible Jack was not meant to hunt down the man who had done it.

Will Graham would walk free through life until he made a mistake.

And Jack would not be the one to catch him when he did.

“Hannibal and I are going to be going on a vacation,” Will said.

Margot tipped her head curiously, a keen understanding in her eyes that Will had always appreciated. She knew more than she would ever admit, and he liked that in her.

“I don’t suppose this has anything to do with Jack Crawford, does it?” she asked.

Will shrugged.

“It might, but the less you know, the less you have to lie. Hannibal is arranging to have you able to live comfortably for several years going forward, and I have something for you.”

Will pulled a business card from his pocket and handed it to her.

“This is one of Hannibal’s friends. I really think you’ll like her,” he said with a wink, “I know we can trust you, but Hannibal insisted I tell you not to say anything he will have to make you regret.”

Margot looked at the card skeptically, but slid it into her own pocket.

“Of course, Will,” she said, smiling softly, “I’m glad you’re happy, and I know better than to try to get in between you two. I’m not like my brother.”

Will smiled.

“Thank you, Margot. I can’t ever thank you enough for what you have done to help us. I hope you aren’t upset you can’t come with us,” he said.

Margot laughed, something she didn’t do often, but Will enjoyed.

“Not at all, Will,” she said, “I want you to be happy with him, and I know my place is here. I have a life to live, and I couldn’t do it if I chased you two around the world. Just be sure to write me every now and then, or let me know you’re still alive. I don’t have many friends.”

Will nodded.

“You’re right. I hope you can find the life you deserve, here, and that you won’t have too much more trouble because of us.”

“You and Doctor Lecter have done more for me than my own family,” Margot pointed out, “so you really don’t need to worry. I learned how to live with wolves from birth. I’m pretty sure I can survive with the sheep now.”

Will grinned.

“I know you can. I have every faith.”

Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter were leaving the country.

Jack and Bella had received an invitation to a dinner that was to serve as a formal goodbye from the pair. They said they planned to travel through Europe, as Hannibal wanted to show Will all his favorite things.

If Jack couldn't prove Will was guilty before they left, he would slip through his fingers and be lost forever.

"You know, Will," Jack said, his last grasp, "I can't help but think you could just be the best actor I've ever seen, and I'm not able to catch you because of it."

Jack took a sip of his coffee, looking at Will over his cup. He had kept his tone light and conversational, so it wouldn't trigger Will to become angry with him.

Jack had invited Will out for coffee, making up an excuse about wanting to talk to him one on one again before he left. He wasn't sure he was very convincing, since it was clear they were not really very close friends.

Will smiled, but he was once again avoiding eye contact. Jack was starting to believe it really did have to do with whether Hannibal was around or not.

"If that were true," Will said, "then I would have to be acting around everyone in my life. Don't you think that would be tiring?"

Jack nodded thoughtfully. He had been considering that, but he had known of many killers who had managed to live a normal life, able to be themselves around their victims.

"I would think so, but I know it's possible. Psychopaths often manage to keep up face around most people, showing their true self around only their targets and victims," Jack pointed out.

Will laughed softly.

"Fair enough, Jack," he said, taking a long drink of his own coffee, "but I've never heard of one before who wasn't caught. Most of them break character eventually, or leave forensic evidence that leads right back to them. I expect your killer is going to be a mite more obvious than it would be if it were me."

Jack pressed his lips together. He wasn't sure what to think anymore. He still thought Will was suspicious, but he didn't have any solid reason to.

"I don't suppose I could convince you to come help me build a profile," Jack said, hoping to earn a reaction at least, "I'd pay you for consulting."

Will shook his head in amusement.

"No thank you, Jack," he said casually, "I don't need the money, and I don't want to get roped into something that could last long enough to interfere with our vacation. You have

plenty of profilers in the FBI, and I hope you catch the person doing this. It's gotten a bit boring, going out, with everyone being afraid of being seen in public. Fewer people to talk to."

Jack huffed a laugh.

"You mean fewer people to mess with, by quoting Shakespeare so they can't understand you," Jack prodded.

Will's eyes sparkled as he took another long drink, refusing to confirm Jack's accusation.

"You'll come to the dinner, right?" Will asked after a moment, "Hannibal and I would be so disappointed if you couldn't. And Bella?"

Jack hesitated. He didn't want to discuss Bella with Will or Doctor Lecter. After finding out she was dealing with cancer, their relationship had been a bit more tense, and Jack was sure Will and the doctor would be able to tell the moment they saw them together. He didn't want to say anything that would make Will figure it out beforehand either.

"That's the plan," Jack said, smiling, "Bella and I would love to come. As long as nothing comes up that pulls me away, I'll be there."

Will smiled brightly, and he looked genuinely pleased to hear it. Jack couldn't help but wonder if anything Will did could be trusted. Jack was supposed to be good at this kind of thing, but Will seemed to be better.

"I'm glad to hear that," Will said, "and if something does come up, please let Bella know she is still welcome. She shouldn't have to spend an evening alone when company is readily available. Hannibal adores her already, and I think she's probably better company than most of the other people he's going to invite."

Jack swallowed, unsure what to do. He worried about Bella if that were to happen. If Will was the person he was hunting, Jack would be sending his wife into the lion's den. Could he trust the men to let his wife leave unscathed if one of them truly was a monster? Could he risk offending them by refusing the offer?

"Ah, we'll have to see," Jack said, "she's been less social recently. She's feeling a bit under the weather, and she doesn't want to be around people much. If I can't go, I don't know if she'll want to."

Will nodded.

"I understand that. I don't much like going out without Hannibal. I hope Bella feels better soon, though. Be sure to tell her I hope she gets well soon."

Jack nodded and took another drink of his coffee.

Will wasn't acting as if he knew Bella had cancer, but that didn't mean anything.

“This is Jack Crawford, and his wife Bella,” Hannibal said, introducing them to Madame Komeda, “Jack is the head of the behavioral analysis unit of the FBI.”

Madame Komeda nodded politely to them both, but Will could see the glint in her eye that suggested she recognized the name.

“There were a few articles about you recently,” she said, grinning widely, “you are investigating the recent deaths of those surgeons.”

Jack nodded, though it was clear he had been hoping not to talk about that at the dinner.

“I am,” he agreed, “but I’m starting to think I should step down and let some of the younger agents have a go at it. Some fresh minds, and all that.”

Will listened, though he pretended to be bored by it all. He stood by Hannibal’s side as he always did, but stared through the crowd without letting his eyes land on anyone or anything. It was funny to think that he pretended to be the aloof one, when Hannibal was much more so than he. Hannibal didn’t care much about the people in the room, but he made them all feel special for having been invited. Will mostly ignored the majority of them, but paid attention to every word spoken and every glance exchanged, calculating what it all meant and how it could all be shifted for his purposes.

“Well, I’m sure you feel just silly for having ever thought Will was suspicious,” Madame Komeda prodded, “he’s just about the least threatening boy I’ve ever met. I can’t imagine seeing those doe eyes and thinking he could be a killer.”

Jack pressed his lips together, clearly unhappy with this line of conversation. Bella looked as if she were about to step in and defend her husband, but Jack laid a hand on her arm to stop her.

“I don’t deal with looks, Ma’am,” Jack said calmly, “I deal with minds. I read the profile of Will, and thought he had the potential to be the man I’m looking for. That’s why I asked him for an interview.”

Madame Komeda was impressed. Jack had just stood up to her, which always earned her respect. It was something Will had learned the first time he had met her.

“Reputation is an idle and most false imposition,” Will chimed in, flashing a bright smile to the small group, “It’s well to ignore what other people think about someone at first, letting them make the first impression instead of letting prejudice take root.”

There was a murmur of agreement around the group, and Will was satisfied that he had made them all lean more towards his side again. It was good to keep them on his side, even when there was no direct opposition. Jack would also be able to see it as him defending how he was investigating, so there would be no reason to be angry.

Will could taste the veiled tension between Jack and Bella all evening. It was clear Jack was still upset that she had not told him about her cancer, and that he had found out through someone else. They were doing a valiant job at hiding it, though, and Will was starting to

think Jack might actually let the case go. He seemed to be realizing that he would lose more than he gained by chasing this particular shadow.

“An excellent selection, as always, Hannibal,” Madame Komeda said during dinner, “You have a very fine palette.”

Hannibal smiled, taking a sip of his wine as he did so.

“Let my liver rather heat with wine than my heart cool with mortifying groans,” he said.

Will huffed a soft laugh that only Hannibal could hear before he replied.

“Wine is an escape from grief, a slip into sleep, a cool forgetting of the hot pains of day. What better cure for being human?” he said, raising an eyebrow at his partner.

Hannibal’s eyes glittered with mischief, and he nodded to Will with all politeness.

“You two still talk to each other as if you were smitten teenagers,” Jack said, a bit brash and loud for such a setting, but amusing to Will. He seemed unhappy that he had to see Hannibal and Will so pleased with each other when he and Bella were struggling.

“We have some salt of our youth in us,” Hannibal replied pleasantly, “I see no reason for affection to lessen with time. At first I did adore a twinkling star, but now I worship a celestial sun.”

Will rolled his eyes fondly at Hannibal. The man was all showmanship and pageantry, but Will loved him. Hannibal just smiled at him pleasantly.

“I actually highly doubt there are many teenagers who speak to each other as Hannibal and I do,” Will pointed out, taking a sip of his wine as he raised an eyebrow at Jack.

Bella smiled at him.

“I think you’re right in that,” she said, “Jack has just never really been the romantic type. At least not in that way. He has his own charms, of course.”

Bella’s gaze softened as she looked at her husband, and Will was happy to see it. He hadn’t really wanted to hurt their relationship with the note, but it was necessary to make Jack more distracted and stressed in order to keep him from poking his nose where it was not wanted.

“All hearts in love use their own tongues,” Will offered, smiling genially to the two of them, “While some may seem more romantic to the outsider than others, each one brings together the right people.”

Jack smiled, though he didn’t seem very reassured by it. He was displeased that Will’s way of speaking seemed to make his wife so happy, especially while they were currently in a bit of an argument.

“I thought Fredrick was going to be here tonight, Hannibal,” Alana piped up from where Hannibal had placed her, directly across from Margot, as per Will’s wishes.

Hannibal nodded.

“He was unable to come, giving us the pleasure of Miss Verger’s company instead,” he replied, smiling at the two.

Will had been right. Alana and Margot were getting along famously, and he was happy for them. Apparently, Margot had already found Alana before the dinner, and they were both pleased to see each other when it began.

Alana smiled.

“I can’t say I’m very disappointed,” she admitted, “though I would never say something bad about Doctor Chilton, of course.”

There was a murmur of agreement, in which Will knew most of the company was lying. No one really had anything genuine to say on Chilton’s behalf. He just tended to have more influence than people were willing to go against, so they pretended to like him. Everything was to stay in the good graces of people with power.

“Did he say why he couldn’t come?” Jack asked, apparently determined to be a part of the conversation if he could.

Hannibal shook his head lightly.

“I was told it was a private matter, and did not feel it wise to pry,” he said, earning another round of agreement.

Don’t pry into Fredrick’s business, because he’ll do it right back.

Jack nodded, though he frowned a bit. Will wondered if he had arranged to speak with Chilton again, or if he was just generally suspicious whenever Will or Hannibal spoke.

Suddenly, Jack’s phone chimed, and he shot a look of apology to Hannibal.

Pulling his phone out, Jack paled a bit and looked up to Bella with concern.

“I’m very sorry, Doctor Lecter, but I’m afraid I have to go. It’s an urgent matter, or else I wouldn’t interrupt the evening.”

Hannibal nodded benevolently.

“I’m quite sure that is the case,” he agreed, “and we understand your profession is prone to disrupting your social life. Must you take your wife away as well, or will she stay to make conversation with Will?”

Jack stopped breathing for a moment, though it was almost unnoticeable. He glanced between Bella, Will, and Hannibal, as if gauging the threat his wife would be under while in their home.

“I’m afraid I must insist she come with me,” Jack decided at last, “I can’t be sure how long it will take, and I would feel more comfortable if I knew she were not stranded in a stranger’s home.”

Will smiled and nodded in understanding.

Jack was clever. He recognized the lions in the room, and wouldn’t abandon his wife to them, even if it meant being a bit rude. He understood that, though he knew it would make Hannibal exasperated.

“Very well. I’ll show you out,” Will said, standing up.

Will helped them gather their few things at the door and ushered them out the door.

“Thank you for coming, both of you,” Will said genuinely as they stepped across the threshold, “Even if our time has been cut short. I hope you find what you are looking for, Jack, and that you are safe in it all.”

Jack nodded solemnly.

“I hope to see you again, Bella,” Will said kindly, “In this life or the next.”

Bella smiled sadly, seeming like she might confess her illness to him just then, but decided against it.

“Thank you, Will,” she said simply, “Travel safely.”

Will smiled and waved as they walked down to their car.

While Will had not necessarily *intended* for Chilton’s body to be found during the dinner, he found it almost poetic that it had been.

Jack was being called away from his only true suspect in order to investigate what he could. Jack would know for sure when he saw it that he had been right all along. He would also know that to hunt Will was a hopeless endeavor. He would learn that he was right to step down. He should spend time with Bella as she died, and not waste his time gaining dangerous enemies. Jack would not bother Hannibal or Will again. He would not look for them, or try to catch them. He would do his best to forget about them.

His addiction was to courses vain.

Chapter End Notes

That's the last chapter for this one! I have another installment of this series planned out, but it's not ready to publish yet. If you're excited for it, then keep an eye out because it

should be coming soon.
Thank you for reading! <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!